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Abandonment — Casuistry

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Church has been such a popular writer as he, both in the range and depth of his influence (cf. Lippert, *art. cit.* 95-7).

He played a decisive part in the overcoming of Jansenism as a corrosive force within the Church (cf. Pius IX, Decree of March 23, 1871, *ap. Gaudé, Theol. Mor.* ed. crit. xlvii). He prepared the way for the definition of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 and for that of Papal Infallibility in 1870 (cf. Pius IX, *ibid.*) He is largely responsible for the now general acceptance of the doctrine of Mary's universal mediation of intercession (*see* MARY, and cf. E. Dublanchy SM, 'Marie Médiatrice', DTC, 2402-03), and is indeed one of the chief founders of the modern Mariological movement in the Church.

In moral theology he worked within the methodological framework that came in after the Council of Trent with the *Institutiones Morales* of Azor (cf. L. Vereecke, *ap. Häring, La Loi du Christ* I, 71 ff.). In recent times the deficiencies of this method have been investigated from the Scriptural, Patristic and especially Thomist points of view (cf. Vereecke, *ibid.*: Th. Deman OP, 'Probabilisme', DTC 417 ff. and *La Prudence* (1949): Labourdette, 'Théorie de la vie morale', RT 50 (1950) 206 ff.; Bérubé, 'Saint Alphonse moraliste actuel?', *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* 12 (1957) 65-98). Conscience is the axis of the *Institutiones Morales*; but charity and Christian discernment (St Thomas's *prudentia*) are the axes of evangelical, Patristic and Thomist moral theology. Prudence uses conscience, but it far transcends it. In actual fact, however, St Alphonsus always transcends, while using, the categories of the *Institutiones Morales* (cf. Labourdette, *art. cit.* 224). Charity is his ultimate category (cf. *Praxis*, IX-XI). He has no treatise on prudence in the *Theologia Moralis*, but he dwells on the necessity of both charity and prudence for the confessor (*Praxis*, Introduction and *passim*). Charity and prudence were his own greatest gifts in dealing with his fellow-men, and they permeate the whole of the *Theologia Moralis*. Repeatedly his great prudence, his discernment, his intuitive capacity for tracing a true middle way between the extremes of harshness and laxity, have been singled out for praise in official Papal documents (*see* C. Damen CSSR, 'Doctor Prudentiae', *Rassegna di Morale e Diritto*, 5 (1939) 220-9, 6 (1940) 43-55) and have had a major influence in winning for him the title of patron of confessors and moral theologians. (*See* AAS 17 (1950) 595-7.)

St Alphonsus gave much time and thought to the elaboration of his theory of equiprobabilism as a middle way between probabiliorism and pure probabilism. Still, its importance in his moral theology as a whole must not be exaggerated. It was a fixed principle with him 'always to put reason before authority', '*semper rationem auctoritati praeponere*' (*Theol. Mor.* Preface). Truth comes first: when it is clear, the opinions of theologians one way or the other cease to count: but when it is not clear, it is important (because *prudens*) to have sound principles for choosing between the various opinions

advanced by theologians on the matter under discussion. Out of 300 cases discussed by St Alphonsus and investigated by Damen only about 40 are solved by the equiprobabilist system: the rest are all solved directly, in terms of inherent truth alone (cf. Damen, *art. cit.* 47). The results of his casuistic labours are of permanent service to moral theology. He bequeathed to it 'a body of really sure moral opinions, as far removed from one extreme as from the other, carefully weighed by the conscience of a saint. To have done this was to have rendered an outstanding service to the Church' (Labourdette, *art. cit.* 230). St Alphonsus is a moral theologian of 'exceptional greatness' (*ibid.* 224).

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ALTAR The theology of the altar, a topic much neglected in the past, was a very early development in the growth of Catholic doctrine. The 'heavenly altar' (to which the Canon of the Mass refers, *in sublime altare Tuum*) was by Irenaeus (IV:xxxii:5, H) declared to be 'the place whither our prayers and offerings ascend', and he cited Apoc 11:19 and 21:3 in evidence. A little later Victorinus of Pettau (CSEL 49:72) commented on the saying of Apoc 6:9 that the souls of the martyrs were under the altar by bringing in the OT with its golden and brazen altars; here the golden altar is that of heaven, and the brazen that of earth; Mt 5:23 should be understood, he claimed, of the heavenly altar, 'for certainly our prayers—which are our gifts—ascend to heaven; the high priest went in to the golden altar once in the year, . . . signifying that the Holy

Spirit was to do this for us'.¹ The poem ADVERSUS MARCIONEM of about the same time has (IV 182-5) the same idea of a golden altar in heaven whither our prayers ascend, and to which Christ referred in Mt 5:23.² See also Hermas 42:2; GCS 48:39. It is important thus to insist on the clear acceptance in the primitive Western Church of the idea of a heavenly altar, as it is mainly in the East that the development of the idea can be followed in later times. The incessant praise of God which the angels render at the heavenly altar had much to do with Western attempts to make the praise of God continual in its monasteries, but the theology of sacrifice which could have grown out of the idea of the heavenly altar did not mature, owing to what looked like a simple assertion by Ambrose (*de sac.* 4:2:7 and 5:2:7; CSEL 73:49, 61) that the altar was *forma corporis Christi*. The word *forma* here seems to be used to mean a shape or mould, which gives its character to the body of Christ which is the Church, all the faithful being grouped round it to form the Church, but it was easy for later readers to think that Ambrose meant that the stone altar (which they were familiar with but which had hardly been adopted in his day) was somehow a type of Christ, in the sense intended by 1 Cor 10:4. No one could find a likeness to Christ in the wooden table-altars which were still used in the days of Optatus (*de schismate* 6:1; CSEL 26:143) and of the mosaics of S. Vitale in Ravenna.

The early Church had much ado to prevent pagan superstitions infiltrating through the ritual that concerned the altar. The taking of an oath while touching the altar (Chrysostom *homil. in Ac* 9:6; PG 60:84) was a practice of the pagans which the Church had to accept perforce, as also was the right of sanctuary for those who touched the altar. Gregory of Nyssa says that no pagan should touch a Christian altar (PG 46:581), and this veto may have been an attempt to keep separate the Christian practice from the pagan. An imperial constitution of the year 397 (*Cod. Theodos.* IX:45:2) allowed the right of sanctuary to Christian churches, but it had been exercised as a matter of custom for at least 50 years before that. It may even have been this right of sanctuary which led to the use of a permanent stone altar in place of the wooden table that was set up and taken down on the occasion of each Mass. One of the earliest indications of the use of a stone altar is the report of the lady Egeria (4:2; CSEL 39:41) that she visited the cave of Elias on Horeb, that there was a stone altar there which was used by the pilgrims for Mass (*Ostenditur etiam ibi altare lapideum, quem posuit . . . Elias ad offerendum Deo. . . . Factus ergo et ibi oblationem.*)

With a stone altar two things can be done that are

¹ Utique ad caelum ascendunt orationes, utique munera nostra orationes sunt quas efficere debemus . . . nam et sacerdos semel introibat in templum . . . ad aram auream: significabat Spiritum sanctum hoc esse facturum. . . .

² Ara nitens auro caelum declarat in alto, Quo sacrae subiere preces sine crimine missae. Hanc aram Dominus dixit, qua munera si quis Offert, ut primum pacem cum fratre retractet.

not possible with a wooden table; it can be consecrated in OT fashion (Gn 28:18) by the pouring of oil upon it, and it can be compared to the tomb of Our Lord, the cloth spread upon it then being likened to the Shroud or *Sindon* in which Christ was wrapped. Both developments had taken place by the 6th cent. The Gallican council of Albon (Epaona) in 517 decreed³ that none but stone altars were to be hallowed with chrism (HL II:1031). In the East, Isidore of Pelusium (*ep.* 1:123; PG 78:264) writes that, 'the pure *sindon* which is spread for the service of the heavenly gifts is the deed done by Joseph of Arimathea. Thus we, hallowing the bread of proposition upon a *sindon*, find without cease the Body of Christ.' The apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* (49) have an episode where, 'the apostle bade his deacon to set forth a table, and he set out a stool which they found there and spread a *sindon* upon it and put thereon the bread of blessing . . .'. The Greek version of these *Acts* was probably made from the Syriac about the 4th cent., and the use of the word *sindon* here would be borrowed from current practice rather than from an earlier tradition.

The placing of the altar over the grave of a martyr is attributed by the *Liber pontificalis* to the action of Pope Felix I (269-74), and it can be proved for the time of Ambrose, who thus (*ep.* 22:13; PL 16:1023) describes his placing of the bodies of Gervase and Protase beneath the altar: 'Let the triumphant victims come to the place where Christ is the sacrifice. He is upon the altar who suffered for all; they beneath it who are redeemed by His passion.' One cannot be sure how long before this the literal carrying out of Apoc 6:9 had occurred to the piety of Christians. Its further elaboration in the imagination of the hagiographer is responsible for the story of Lucian of Antioch (PG 114:409) who, when dying in prison after being tortured, bids his disciples bring in the bread and wine, and as they cannot smuggle an altar into the prison he says that he himself will be the altar. He celebrates Mass then upon his own breast, and communicates himself and them, before he dies. Such pious liberties, if not regulated, can lead on to the enormous blasphemy of the satanic black mass.

There are three ways in which an altar was deemed to be consecrated. Either it was hallowed by the descent of the Spirit in the course of the celebration of the Eucharist upon that altar, or it was anointed, or relics were placed in it or beneath it. Origen (in the Latin version of Rufinus) seems to favour the first view when he speaks of the altar (*hom. in Josue* 2:1; GCS 30:296) as 'consecrated by the precious blood of Christ', and the Roman usage down to the 10th cent. was to consecrate altars by saying Mass upon them. But once the idea is abroad that the altar is a type of Christ, then the anointing of it before it is put to use becomes proper. The OT practice of Jacob can then be invoked and a ritual elaborated. Such a practice is witnessed by Caesarius of Arles (in his *sermo* 228, of Morin's edition) and wherever

³ Altaria nisi lapidea chrisimatis unctione non sacrentur.

the Church under a recrudescence of OT ideas it was generally adopted. It is in Anglo-Saxon circles that the practice of placing relics in the altar is first looked upon as the act of consecration, as in the *Egbert Pontifical* (26 and 46) and the *Benedictional of Archbishop Robert* (96). In the latter work (85), as in the *Lanalet Pontifical* (12) there is a prayer which asks that 'this altar may be worthy that the elements chosen for the sacrifice and placed upon it may by a secret power be converted into the Body and Blood of the Redeemer', a sufficient indication of a realist theology about the Eucharist.¹

It cannot be denied that in the symbolism which was followed by the Eastern churches (where the altar was the tomb of Christ and the bread and wine like the embalmed and buried body of the Lord), the remembrance of the Resurrection was clearer, while in the Western symbolism there was better preserved the remembrance of the Passion. In the homilies of Narsai (TES VIII:1:21) it is claimed that at Mass 'the Spirit which raised Him from the dead comes down and celebrates the mysteries of the Resurrection of His Body', and holy communion is compared to the apparitions of the risen Christ (see EPIKLESIS). In the West, however, the tradition which comes down from Bede to Amalarius and to St Thomas (3a:83:1:2) is that the altar is a memorial of the cross of Christ (*altare est representativum crucis Christi*). Bede says (PL 93:155) that Christ offered Himself on the altar of the cross. If the cross was an altar, then truly the present altar can be compared with the cross. In commenting on Heb 13:10 St Thomas says that the altar there spoken of is either the cross or Christ Himself, who is the golden altar in heaven (as Cyril of Alexandria held: PG 68:620). This text, which seems to modern Catholics a plain hint that the early Church knew of an altar of sacrifice on earth, was not much used in antiquity (see CCS 944 f.). Rupert of Deutz (PL 168:366) draws in two other texts (Amos 9:1 and Jn 12:32) to illustrate this idea of Christ being on the altar as He was on the cross, but it is clear that such an interpretation could only have arisen after the practice of reservation had begun.

The adornment of the altar—an endless topic, but hardly theological save in one or two points—began very early. Origen knows of it (*hom. in Josue* 10:3; GCS 30:360), while the 4th-cent. Arian material in the *Paschal Chronicle* (PG 92:737) tells how Constantius, the emperor, gave for the altar cloths that were woven with gold and jewels. In Augustine (*serm.* 35 of Mai's edition) there is authority for flowers being used to decorate an altar (not placed on it but set round about) for he speaks of the newly-baptized decorating the altar like lilies. This practice the Church had to approve against Jansenist prohibitions (D 1532). Candles were hung from the ciborium above the altar or else placed near it on the ground. This is the sense of Paulinus of Nola's

¹ Dignumque sit supra quod electas ad sacrificium creaturas in corpus et sanguinem redemptoris virtus secreta convertat . . .

line, 'the altar is brightly crowned with a . . . candles'.²

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J. H. C.

ALTRUISM A term coined by the French positivist Auguste Comte from the Italian adj. *altrui*, was used in a general sense (esp. through adoption by Spencer) of regard for others as a principle of action. Psychologically it denotes an attitude or disposition of love for another. In ethics it describes the theory according to which the moral end of conduct is the good of others, however conceived. It involves discussion of the problems of love of others, including God, in the natural order, for current misconceptions of the subject are notoriously misleading. By unselfishness (a substitute for charity) a woman chiefly means taking trouble for others; a man means not giving trouble to others. Thus each sex, as C. S. Lewis put it 'without any obvious unreason, can and does regard the other as radically selfish' (*Screwtape Letters*). Though it is impossible to sunder human love from sexuality without yielding to an angelic illusion, love is not a euphemism for sexual desire, nor is it an obsession (like Hazlitt's love for his landlady's daughter) which is a subjective imitation of the reciprocated ideal. Love is the strongest and highest act of the will whereby we deliberately choose God as the supreme value and wish others as much good as we wish ourselves. Unselfish human love may well be a specific talent which some possess. The article proceeds historically, from Comte (I) to the Utilitarians (II) and to the modern followers of Kant (III). Aristotle (IV) is next considered as the foundation for the medieval theology of love (V), and there is (VI) a note on modern psychological theories of love.

I For Comte social happiness is man's ultimate end and morality becomes identical with extreme universal altruism. 'The object of morals', he wrote, 'is to make our sympathetic instincts preponderate as far as possible over the selfish instincts, social feeling over personal feelings', and on the basis of a modified form of Gall's theory of cerebral physiology he distinguished three sympathetic instincts: attachment, veneration and benevolence (*Positive Polity* I, 73, 366). But, except for a touching faith in the effect of 'the Social State', the mental dynamics by which personal selfishness is to be transformed into universal love are obscure, nor does he

² Clara coronantur deusis altaria lychnis (*carmina* 14:99; CSEL 30:49).